

Quality Standards

A variety of quality standards must be met for a program to (1) be an authorized and a legitimate Partners in Policymaking program and (2) achieve the outcomes described in this handbook. These standards include:

- A commitment to replicating the model described in this handbook
- Quality principles of process, approach, and outcomes
- Core values about people with disabilities
- The duties of coordinators
- National speakers
- Selection criteria
- Competencies of graduates.

The last section of this handbook contains a set of guidelines for *disciplined business conduct*, and a series of policy statements on sexual harassment, alcohol and other drug use, and workplace violence.

A Commitment to Replicating the Model

As a Partner's coordinator, you and/or your organization are responsible for replicating a program that has been proven effective. The model has worked in almost every state and internationally. It is also adaptable enough to be relevant to the situation in the location using it. The key to the model's success, however, is clear – **in order for Partners graduates to be successful, the model must be fully implemented.**

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities wants Partners to continue to be a success. In addition, it has a direct interest in that success. According to the Office of the Minnesota Attorney General, the Partners in Policymaking name and model is the intellectual property of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and the State of Minnesota. To protect these proprietary privileges, the Council wants to make sure that a leadership training program that refers to itself as a Partners in Policymaking program or a Partners replication follows the same principles outlined in this handbook.



Replication – to take a successful, complete model and follow the same processes and ideas with funding and support from local groups and individuals.

Information about copyright, trademark and the Program License Agreement can be found at www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/classroomcoordinators.html.



Here are some key points about replicating the Partners program:

- ▶ The **success of the model program** has been documented for more than two decades. The quality principles and curriculum have been formulated from a variety of disciplines. The results have been tested and successful outcomes documented. *Changes to the Partners model program should not be made unless it can be demonstrated that those changes improve the program.*
- ▶ From year to year and from state to state, Partners graduates should be on the same “playing field,” to ensure they can assist each other when advocating for disability rights at all levels of government. Similarly, it is important that Partners graduates achieve the same levels of competency across geographic lines. Some Partners graduates are disappointed that they weren’t trained in certain competencies that other Partners graduates acquired.
- ▶ Using this handbook, replicating the model program, and incorporating the online courses will enable Coordinators and funders to maintain the highest quality standards. To do this, you must have a frame of reference. The replication model provides that and includes a dedication to improvement.
- ▶ By following the replication model, Coordinators, and possibly the funders, are freed from the overwhelming task of trying to “reinvent the wheel.” The replication model is proven. Following the “recipe” allows the Coordinator to customize the program for the state, while leaving the proven curriculum intact.

Quality Principles: Process, Approach and Outcomes

Partners in Policymaking is based on a core set of principles about process, approach, and outcomes:

- **Experiential Learning:** Partners participants learn by doing. They prepare and deliver testimony. They practice speaking to public officials. A variety of different learning methods ensure participants acquire the competencies.
- **Diversity:** Partners groups are diverse in experiences, disability types, geographic location, gender, racial and ethnic backgrounds, income levels and education levels. Partners participants learn as much from the experiences of their peers as from the curriculum and presenters.

- **National Speakers:** Partners participants obtain training from speakers who provide a national perspective that is up-to-date on best practices and state-of-the-art.
- **Best Practices:** Partners participants learn about what's possible, not about what already is! They break out of the status quo and ask, "What if..."
- **Leadership:** Partners participants acquire knowledge for change, not just for knowledge's sake. They use the things they learn to take action for social change. They provide leadership in their communities. Partners is not about getting the most services for participants and their families.
- **Length of Time:** Funders make a commitment to Partners programs for a full 8 sessions of training. Partners participants receive 128 hours of instruction over the course of a program year.
- **Sufficient Funding:** The funding agency commits to provide a level of funding that will ensure a quality program, based on the standards and recommendations in this handbook. Funders commit to quality replications that pay for all the program related expenses. This money supports the other quality principles
- **Evaluation:** The compilation of initial, six-month, and long-term surveys reveal the effectiveness of the program, and may be a critical factor in a funder's decision to continue funding future Partners programs. Partners participants and speakers evaluate their experiences with the program. Partners participants are surveyed before they begin the program, and at six months following graduation. Long-term surveys are done for several years. These results are tracked and monitored for long-term trends.
- **Not an Organization:** Partners is a leadership training program, not an organization. The real work of graduates is in community, state and national organizations. The program links them with networks and helps them acquire the competencies needed to succeed.
- **Outcomes:** The program's ultimate outcomes are increased independence, productivity, integration, inclusion and self-determination for all Partners participants and their family members.





Core Values about People with Disabilities

A quality Partners in Policymaking program is built on critical values relating to the inherent worth of people with disabilities. These values must be the underlying thread woven throughout every aspect of the training program. Partners is all about how to achieve a vision which respects these values.

Value #1: People with disabilities are **people first**. They are not “the handicapped” or “the disabled.” Using People First Language is a must – no labels!

Value #2: People with disabilities need **real friendships**, not just relationships with paid staff.

Value #3: People with disabilities are entitled to the full meaning of the right to free speech. The ability to **communicate**, in whatever form, must be available to every person with a disability.

Value #4: People with disabilities must be able to enjoy full **mobility and accessibility** that allows active participation in community life.

Value #5: People with disabilities must be assured **continuity** in their lives through families and neighborhood connections.

Value #6: People with disabilities must be treated with **respect and dignity**.

Value #7: People with disabilities must have the **freedom to choose** how they want to live their lives and receive the support they need.

Value #8: People with disabilities must be able to **exercise choice and control** in all areas of their lives.

Value #9: People with disabilities must be able to live in **homes** of their choice and choose the supports they need.

Value #10: People with disabilities must be able to enjoy the benefits of true **productivity** through employment and/or **contributions** as members of their communities.

These values were conceived in 1987, and continue to reflect best practices.

Coordinator's Essential Duties

The essential duties of the Coordinator of a Partners in Policymaking program are in eight areas:

- Recruitment and selection of Partners participants
- Program design
- Session processes
- Speaker arrangements
- Accessibility
- Partners support
- Quality improvement
- Relationship with funders.

These duties address the needs facing Partners Coordinators and Partners participants. The needs may change from year to year, but there is one constant:

If the Coordinator, presenters, and participants-individually and as a whole-cannot model and create an inclusive, welcoming environment during a Partners weekend, then Partners participants cannot be expected to achieve inclusive welcoming environments in their communities.

The following is a checklist of duties and responsibilities.

Recruitment and Selection of Partners participants

- A diverse group of qualified individuals has been selected (see Selection Criteria).
- Participants are ready and willing to learn a new way of thinking and will use this knowledge to achieve systems change at local, state and federal levels.

Program Design

- Partners sessions reflect the core values being taught from previous page.
- All sessions ensure that all Partners participants have the opportunity to learn that session's competencies. The critical factors include the selection of the speaker and his/her topic, hand-outs, activities, small group exercises, and homework.
- Every session has a combination of learning methods, including presentation, discussion, and exercises, to assure full participation by each and every person.





- The year's program is structured so that Partners participants learn competencies in a logical, sequential order. Each session adds to the completeness of the program and builds upon the previous session.
- Nationally-recognized speakers who are leaders in their field have been recruited to instruct Partners participants in best practices in disability issues.
- Speakers present philosophies of disability issues, concrete information, and specific strategies to create systems change.

Session Processes

- Meetings (presentations and breaks) are run on schedule.
- All Partners participants and speakers have a clear understanding of expectations.
- Each participant has an accurate agenda for each session at least two weeks in advance.
- Each agenda is specific about starting and ending times for each topic during the weekend, break and meal times, meeting room locations, and types of activities during each session (for instance, lecture, small group exercises).
- Supplies are ready for use during the session: flip charts to record small group work, odorless markers, 3-hole punch, masking tape, extra name tags, sharpened pencils, writing tablets, hand-outs of previous sessions, extra tapes when recording sessions, Internet access, back up computers, other personal devices, and any other materials necessary to ensure a smooth, worry-free session.
- The Coordinator actively observes every Partners session, remaining in the meeting room during the session, to assess the speakers' presentations, gauge Partners participants' involvement, and self-evaluate the success of that session. When feasible, notes are recorded on a laptop computer and debriefings are held.
- Hotel staff assure that all persons involved in Partners are treated with dignity and respect.
- The Coordinator is familiar with the meeting rooms, including the thermostat, lights, and microphones; and how to easily contact facility staff for assistance.
- The status of equipment (LCD/digital projector, laptops for speakers, secure uninterrupted access to Internet for laptop/DVD) is verified. Easy access to technical support is available.

- Presentations are loaded on speaker laptops in advance of the session. All equipment is tested, including DVDs for sound, if necessary, and closed captioning.
- Facility staff have contingency plans in place in case of any problems and/or mechanical failures.
- Microphones are used by everyone – staff, presenters, participants asking questions of the speaker (clip, lavalier, or headset may be better or easier for speakers, while hand-held microphones might work better for participants).
- All Partners participants, guests, and speakers can hear what's being said.
- Packets of information are prepared for each participant, for every session. The packets include the agenda, hand-outs from the speakers, biography of the speakers and their addresses (including e-mail addresses), other reading materials, homework assignments, evaluations, and reimbursement forms. For those with Internet access, place all forms online.
- Partners participants and speakers think about how the Internet plays a role in whatever topic is covered, whether the topic deals with a specific level of government or addresses a specific life area.
- The competencies of each session; and the values of independence and self-determination, productivity, integration and inclusion are reinforced.
- Teams of Partners can do onsite tasks, such as morning greeters, speaker assistants, collect evaluation forms, help with microphones, etc.
- Participants are reminded to turn off cell phones and all other personal devices.



Speaker Arrangements

- Each speaker has a clear understanding of what is expected from his/her presentation, and what competencies should be achieved by participants during the session.
- The speaker is informed of the unique and individual dynamics of the members of the Partners class so that the speaker is presenting information geared to the level of understanding of the class.
- Each speaker knows what adaptations are made available to participants who need adaptations to facilitate learning.
- Each speaker understands exactly when and where his/her presentation is scheduled. This information is conveyed in written personal communication



and by mailing him/her the session agenda well in advance of the scheduled presentation.

- Contracts with speakers clarify who is financially responsible for what expenses (for example: transportation, meals, incidentals).
- Every speaker is informed of the date his/her handouts are needed prior to the presentation. (This allows time for the Coordinator to make copies and include them in the monthly packets for participants.)
- Speakers' hotel accommodations and transportation from the airport to the hotel/ facility are arranged and/or provided, and clearly communicated.
- Speakers are provided with the name, address, telephone number and directions from the airport to the hotel/facility. Emergency phone numbers are available for the Coordinator and the speaker.
- Speakers receive the correct payment of expenses within a reasonable time frame after their presentations.
- Each speaker provides an up-to-date vita and contact information (including e-mail addresses) to the Coordinator who includes this information in participant packets.

Accessibility

- The hotel/facility site is personally visited prior to booking to verify accessibility in hotel guest rooms and bathrooms, elevators, meeting rooms, public restrooms, restaurants, bars, entrances and parking areas.
- Meeting rooms and dining areas are set up in a manner that allows complete wheelchair access throughout the room, including access to the tables in the front of the room, the podium, and meal service tables.
- The necessary adaptations to reading materials (including simplifying the materials, translation into other languages and Braille) are made to provide equal access to every part of the Partners program. Any information that is posted online must be accessible.
- All presenters are notified of necessary adaptations in advance to ensure that every participant receives the full benefits of and enjoys full participation in every session.
- Speakers are informed ahead of time regarding the use of interpreters and other types of accommodations. Speakers are asked to send their notes/ materials ahead of time to assist the interpreter(s) in providing the best possible service.

- If training sessions are videotaped/or audiotaped, speakers give prior permission to record presentations. (These recordings may be used by Partners participants who require review or repetition in order to learn and/or acquire the competencies.)
- If training sessions are recorded (audio and/or video), personnel are in place with the necessary equipment in order to successfully and unobtrusively record the sessions.
- Translators are provided to enable full participation of all.

Support to Partners Participants

- All Partners participants are encouraged to write thank you letters or send e-mail thank you messages to speakers and/or guests. (This is both an exercise in effective and timely communication and a means for Partners participants to express appreciation to the speakers/guests for their presentations.)
- There is open communication among Partners staff, funding organization staff, participants, speakers, and guests.
- Friendships and relationships between parents and self-advocates in the Partners class are encouraged, and facilitated when necessary. This will develop the camaraderie necessary for a successful long-term Partners network. Encourage both face-to-face, e-mail interactions, and Facebook groups.
- Expenses are reimbursed within a reasonable time after forms are submitted by Partners participants.
- E-mail addresses are included in the participant lists distributed to Partners participants. The use of this technology is encouraged and information on low/no cost local Internet providers (IP) is available upon request.
- Post-graduate support is provided for Partners graduates to ensure that they can and will continue the systems change advocacy learned during the training program.
- Answer specific questions and resolve individual issues with persons/organizations with expertise in the state where the Partners program is being carried out.

Quality Improvement

- All aspects of the Partners program are assessed regularly through self-evaluation, participants' evaluations, and outside evaluation.





- Improvements are made to ensure that the program reflects the highest quality standards.
- The Coordinator is committed to the idea of continuous improvement of the program. If the opportunity arises to make things run better, faster, or at less expense without jeopardizing the integrity of the program, it is taken.
- All evaluations are read and examined for actions that can be taken to improve the program.
- Improvements are tested and results measured.
- The Coordinator must resolve complaints to the satisfaction of the person who made the complaint.

Relationship with Funders

- Funding for Partners is sought from sources who support the vision of a Partners in Policymaking quality model, believe in the value of empowerment, and will nurture the efforts of the Partners staff and its participants.
- Careful attention is paid to the budget.
- There is close contact with funding sources to resolve any discrepancies or problems.
- Regular reports about the program are provided to the funding organization according to its specifications.

National Speakers

The quality of Partners depends on national speakers who:

- Are expert in the topic area, including an understanding of the connection between levels of government, systems change, and policy results;
- Have a broad perspective on best practices and disability issues;
- Know the best practices that are consistent with an empowering vision;
- Understand and are committed to the core values and principles of the Partners program;
- Understand what Partners in Policymaking is all about;
- Know how to communicate what they know through adult learning methods;
- Are motivated and enthusiastic themselves, and can inspire and energize participants.

In-state and local speakers can augment and complement sessions. The predominant message or messages of any session should be carried by a national speaker who is committed to state-of-the-art information.

- Speakers must understand new concepts and best practices in the field and be able to incorporate with a broad perspective and expertise on specific issues. Often, the federal/national government sets disability policy for the entire nation.
- Speakers must teach best practices and “what’s possible,” while local speakers must be able to go beyond the status quo. Partners participants already know disability policy in their community – they live with it day in and day out.
- Cross-fertilization of ideas can only occur when exchange happens across communities. Speaker selection is one way to bring information from other communities to Partners participants.
- Speakers who are not local can say things that local speakers cannot. Local speakers may feel the pressure of their occupations, positions, or political connections.
- Partners participants need opportunities for developing connections and mentorships with speakers if they are to be promoted to national boards and commissions.
- Partners graduates need to be on a level playing field with Partners graduates in other states or regions to be able to effectively network. Speaker selection brings the same level of information and skills to each Partners group.
- Speakers have the opportunity to get to know a small group of people, enriching the speaker’s work with the experiences of Partners participants.

Coordinators should select speakers so that a wide range of people speak to the Partners participants over the course of a year: people with disabilities, men and women, and people from diverse cultures and backgrounds.





Criteria for Selection of Partners Participants¹

A quality Partners program is committed to recruiting a diverse group of participants positioned to engage in systems change. The goal is not to simply develop the skills of each individual, but also to create a group of people who can support one another and bring a range of talents to bear in their state.

For these reasons, the following criteria should guide your participant selection:

Parents of Young Children Most Preferable

They are receptive to new approaches and best practices, in a position to make the greatest changes over the life span of their children, and not locked into the status quo.

Self-Advocates

Select those adults with disabilities who are ready and willing to take on the system and work and live in the community.

Not Involved in Advocacy Organizations – “New Blood”

Lots of folks are already active advocates. Invest your funding in those who are inexperienced!

Ethnic Minority Representation

The make-up of your class should reflect the make-up of the general population.

Male/Female Mix

Lots of moms apply. The program also needs dads. Ensure a good ratio of male to female within the self-advocate population, too.

Cross-Disability Representation

Ensure that the participants selected represent a wide range of disabilities.

Geographic Representation and Economic Diversity

Partners participants should represent all parts of your target area and economy.

Motivated for Systems Change vs. Personal Gain

Try to select applicants who want to go beyond their own personal issues.

1. A fuller discussion of the rationale for some of these criteria is in [Recruitment and Selection](#)

Alignment to Independence, Productivity, Self Determination, Integration and Inclusion (IPSII)

Choose participants who embrace the philosophy that people with disabilities belong in the community, not in segregated settings.

Enthusiasm for Learning

Partners needs participants who are eager to learn and are open to new ways of thinking! Again, “new blood” is important—participants who are not already stuck in the status quo.

Evidence of Commitment to Long-Term Advocacy Efforts

Systems change can be a long term process. Participants need to be tenacious and determined.

**Make sure these criteria are included in your application form.
Do not judge applicants on questions you haven't asked.**

Competencies

Partners in Policymaking is not a “get-together.” It is a focused effort to develop knowledge, skills and abilities. You get funding and attract participants because you promise results. Quality Partners programs take seriously their commitment to make good on their promises and deliver results.

The results you promise are that, upon graduation, Partners participants will be able to:

- Describe the history of services for, and perceptions of, people with developmental disabilities.
- Describe significant contributions of the parents' movement.
- Describe the history of the self-advocacy and independent living movements.
- Describe the benefits and values supporting inclusion and quality education, including post secondary education, for students with and without disabilities.
- Outline specific strategies to achieve inclusion and quality education.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the service coordination system and what services may be available.
- Describe the importance of self-directed planning for people with developmental disabilities.
- Understand the principles of choice and control of resources in self-directed planning.



- Understand the reasons for and the importance of proper positioning techniques for people with physical disabilities.
- Describe examples of state-of-the-art technologies that can benefit people with disabilities.
- Describe the importance of supported, competitive employment opportunities.
- Understand that a flexible, responsive system of supports for the families of children with disabilities is the cornerstone for a true system of community supports for people with developmental disabilities.
- Understand the need for all individuals to experience regular and ordinary changes in lifestyle across the lifespan.
- Know/understand the importance of home ownership/ control as one of the defining characteristics of adult life in our culture.
- Understand the basic principles and strategies being used to support people with developmental disabilities in their own homes across the lifespan.
- Create a vision for the year 2020 (and beyond) for people with disabilities.
- Understand how a bill becomes a law at the state and federal levels.
- Identify critical federal issues and the process by which participants can personally address their concerns.
- Demonstrate successful techniques for advocating for services to meet the needs of unserved and underserved individuals.
- Draft and deliver testimony for legislative hearings.
- Learn how to meet a public official and discuss issues.
- Identify strategies for beginning and sustaining grassroots organizing.
- Understand when and how to use the media to effectively promote participants' issues.
- Demonstrate proper procedures for conducting a meeting.
- Gain a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure and serving on boards.